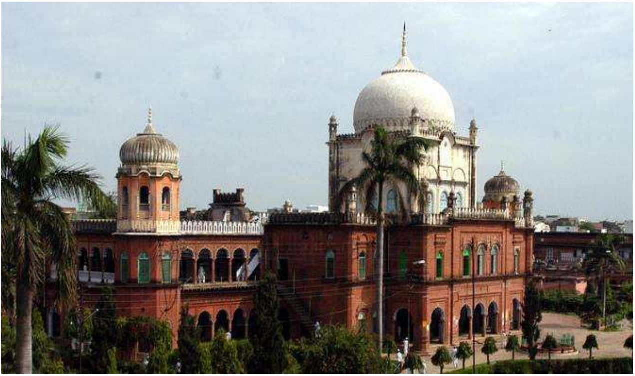
Dar al-'Ulum Deoband



A Brief Account of its Establishment and Background

Mufti Muhammad Zafiruddin Miftahi

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Preface

It is solely with the *fadhl* of Allah that we present to you this short book which highlights the background to the establishment to that beacon of light in India which has illuminated the world, the centre of Islamic learning, the house of knowledge, the Dar al-'Ulum Deoband. We came across this book on the famous Pearls of the Elders (www.zakariyya.wordpress.com) website and due to its excellent nature of presenting facts surrounding the establishment of the Dar al-'Ulum we found it necessary to compile it and present it as a book. We first worked on the manuscript almost six months ago but due to other occupations we were unable to release it. However, after forming the Imam Gangohi Academy of Research we have decided to make this the first publication under it auspices.

Mawlana Abu Zaynab had already edited the English translation before publishing it to the aforementioned website and we have simply utilised his edition. Where we felt necessary we added footnotes.

If per chance any errors are found (Allah forbid!) then do point these out. Additionally we welcome your comments, recommendations and suggestions to improve future editions and publications which we – Allah willing! – hope to undertake.

If you so wish to copy, distribute or transmit this book in any manner or form then kindly acknowledge our team as well as the original author, translator, and editor. No copyright on this book exist as we believe the history of Dar al-'Ulum Deoband should be told and retold to the coming generations so that they may appreciate the effort and sacrifices of our pious predecessors.

May Allah Almighty make this publication a means of our forgiveness in His court and a means for the *nur* of *Iman* spreading to all corners of the earth. *Ameen.*

Humble requests to remember the *ummah* in your *duas*.

Ibn Rashid Ahmad
For: Friends of Deoband
11 Dhu 'l-Qa'dah 1433
28 September 2012

Editor's note

The article below gives a brief account of the history of Dar al-'Ulum Deoband, one of the leading Islamic institutes of the Indian Subcontinent. This piece, which I originally read in the mid-90s, was one of the first I read on the subject, spurning me to study Urdu and reading into the topic further. It was only a few weeks ago that I discovered it again and felt compelled to edit and reproduce it on the Internet for a wider readership. The article – originally published in a 1984 edition of a South African journal called "Awake To The Call of Islam", published by the Young Men's Muslim Association in Benoni[1] – throws much light on the socio-political and historical context of the founding of the Dar al-'Ulum and its various accomplishments over the years. I pray that Allah makes this a means for myself and others to draw close to the way of the *Akabir* and become the complete embodiment of their lives. *Ameen*.

Mawlana Abu Zaynab

[1] A journal containing Islamic articles which is published to date, in South Africa. Copies may be obtained through the association in Benoni or alternatively through the Majlisul Ulama of South Africa.

Introduction

It was not long ago that in the Indian subcontinent the propagation and dissemination of the values of moral excellence and nobility, of love and human brotherhood, and the diffusion of religious beliefs and ethical precepts deriving from the Qur'an and the Sunnah had come to be beset with great hazards and dangers. Islamic civilisation and culture, or rather the entire religious mode of thought and feeling, had then come to be engaged in a life and death struggle. The overwhelming flood of atheistic and "free" thought had virtually swamped everything. Heretical movements had acquired force and were exercising great influence on the minds of the faithful. It appeared at the time as if Muslims in India would no longer be able to follow the path of the true faith.

In those calamitous and critical times, the momentous and far reaching services of Dar al-'Ulum Deoband and its numerous alumni in the field of religion, scholarship, education, and political and national life cannot be regarded as less valuable than those of any watchful government. Whatever little purity of conduct and morals, clarity and firmness of beliefs and dealings, nobility and humanity there was found to be left or is thought to have increased in the subcontinent, may rightly be traced to the ceaseless and untiring efforts of the learned *'ulama* of the Dar al-'Ulum or to the spirit of sacrifice and the nightly prayers of the great men who had founded it.

When modern culture and civilisation attacked the Islamic way of life under cover of the British rule in India, it was Deoband and the great leaders of the faith produced by it that sought to withstand it with the veritable firmness of mountains, and successfully endeavoured to protect the religious faith of Muslims from destruction at the hands of the British.

Similarly, the contribution made by the alumni of this great institution to the cause of the political freedom of the subcontinent undoubtedly constitutes a golden chapter in the history of India. It was the great founders of the Dar al-'Ulum who first raised the flag of Indian independence; they sought to unite the people of the land, irrespective of creed and community under this flag, and then they themselves came forward to make personal sacrifices in that great cause. It is perhaps for this reason that the fame of Deoband in foreign countries far exceeded that of any other educational institution of India.

In that trying and critical interregnum, the imparting of the knowledge of the fundamentals of the faith and of religious obligations, and the dissemination of the Qur'an and the Hadith was a unique achievement of the scholars and theologians of Deoband. At the time that the Islamic world had virtually lost all knowledge of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the seminary at Deoband was echoing with the sounds of:

> *"And so did Allah say…"*

and

> *"So did the Prophet (peace be on him) say…"*

There were gathered here young men from the distant corners of the Indian subcontinent; students of religious learning had also come from far off lands such as Afghanistan, Burma, Samarkand, Bukhara and many African countries. They were all seekers of knowledge, taking back with them the wealth they had acquired here and returning with the firm determination to illuminate their own homelands with the knowledge imparted at Deoband.

Background

India's transitional, traumatic age had started long before 1717 AD, at the time when the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar had given permission to the British to carry on trade with India, and had also exempted them from many taxes and duties. Later on, Emperor Shah Alam II granted them the revenue authority of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa for the paltry sum of 2.1 million rupees per annum. Emboldened by all this, Lord Lake attacked Delhi in 1803, imprisoned the Emperor and forced him to sign a treaty according to which the Emperor's rule came to be confined to the city, the Red Fort of Delhi and the rural areas adjoining it, while the rest of the Empire was to be administered by the British. It was also agreed upon that the welfare of the subjects, including that of the Muslims, would be the responsibility of the new rulers. These were the conditions that led *Siraj al-Hind* Shah 'Abd al-Aziz Muhaddith al-Dehlawi (d. 1823 AD), a scion of the *Waliullah* family, to declare that India was no longer the Land of the Faith (*Dar al-Islam*). He also declared that Delhi could no longer be regarded as subject to the writs issued by a Muslim imam, being in fact under the hegemony of Christian rule, which extended from the imperial capital (Delhi) up to Calcutta in the east.

The light of the teachings of Islam, the Book of Allah and the Sunnah that had illumined the entire subcontinent with its dazzling radiance had, as a matter of fact, begun to dim during the lifetime of Shah 'Abd al-Aziz, and it was because of this that he inspired his follower, the famous martyr, Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (d. 1830 AD) and his no less famous nephew, Mawlana Shah Muhammad Isma'il Shahid (d. 1830 AD) to initiate, with the help of an organised group of followers, a determined struggle aimed at bringing about a religious revolution throughout the country. They had the blessings of the farsighted men of Faith throughout the land. The martyrs and their close companions themselves led the struggle, and the soil of Balakot, which received the drops of their blood, is witness to their great sacrifice.

Another luminary of the *Waliullah* family, Shah Muhammad Ishaq of Delhi, had long followed in the footsteps of his maternal grandfather, Shah 'Abd al- Aziz of Delhi. He carried on the traditions of religious scholarship and teaching that had long ago been started by Shah 'Abd al-Rahim (d. 1718 AD), father of Shah Waliullah of Delhi. But conditions in Delhi had so far deteriorated that even Shah Muhammad Ishaq had no option but to bid farewell to his homeland.

He was followed by Mawlana Shah 'Abd al-Ghani Mujaddadi (d. 1878 AD), a scion of the *Mujaddadi* family and a disciple of the *Waliullah* family. He had come to be regarded as the most important teacher of Hadith in the country and the chief source of inspiration for men of action and learning. The extremely adverse conditions prevailing in the country at that time, however, obliged him — the greatest exponent of the science of Hadith in the contemporary world — also to leave the land of his birth and become an émigré.

The Final Collapse of the Mughal Empire and the Massacre of Muslims

With the events of 1857 came the climax of this age of calamity and crisis. The Mughal Empire came to an irrevocable end; the light finally left the lamp that had flickered for a century and a half. The British were now the supreme rulers of the country, the arbiters of the nation's destiny. What did it all lead to? There was a general massacre of Muslims. The *'ulama* were ruthlessly put to the sword. Along with the destruction of Delhi came also the end, one after another, of its religious seminaries and educational institutions. The *'ulama* and religious leaders who escaped martyrdom were taken to the Andaman Islands (Kala Pani)[2] where they ended their lives in utter helplessness after having suffered all kinds of tortures and ignominies.

Now the light of knowledge had completely been extinguished in the country, nor was there the least vestige of power and sovereignty left in the hands of the Muslims. The last of the Mughal Emperors, Bahadur Shah Zafar[3], had been arrested and deported from the country. The Red Fort was a picture of desolation and the great Jamia Masjid of Delhi in utter ruin. The educational institutions that had been imparting instruction to the Muslim youth in cities like Delhi, Lahore, Agra, and Jaunpur and similarly at many places in the provinces of Gujarat, Bihar, Madras and Bengal had all closed down after the establishment of British rule. This was mainly because they were being run with munificent grants from the Mughal court and from Muslim nobles. They also received financial aid from charitable trusts that had been founded in the past for this very purpose, and that had all stopped functioning or had been confiscated by the government after the establishment of British rule in India.

The British author, W. W. Hunter, has pointed out how the British had deprived the indigenous educational institutions of financial aid that had long sustained them. Most of the families of the nobles in Bengal used to bear the entire expenses of the *madrassahs* where their own children received education along with the children of their poor neighbours. Such family educational institutions, however, dwindled and their influence diminished as the noble families that had sustained them fell victim to economic depression and poverty.[4]

Hunter further points out that the confiscation of trusts and charitable freeholds led to the ruin of innumerable families and to the total disruption of the educational system of India's Muslims since that system had been entirely dependent on financial aid from those charitable trusts. Religious education had no place at all in the educa-

[2] The Andaman Islands are a group of Indian Ocean archipelagic islands in the Bay of Bengal, between India to the west and Burma to the north and east. The islands where first occupied by the British in 1789. "Kala Pani" which means "black water: was the name given to the islands by the Indian prisoners.

[3] Bahadur Shah Zafar reigned as Mughal ruler from 1837 – 1857. He died in exile in British Burma in 1862.

[4] W.W. Hunter, "The Indian Musalmans"

tional system that was introduced by the British after the establishment of their rule. This fact has been acknowledged by, among others, Hunter:

> *There was no provision for the religious education of the Muslim youth in the British educational system. The British Government, however, went beyond this and misused the income of Muslim charitable trusts.*

It is Hunter again who points out that the Muslim accusation about the misuse of funds by the government was not untrue; it is futile to deny that Muslim trusts, if properly managed, would certainly have supported institutions of higher learning in Bengal.

Having destroyed the educational system of the Indian Muslims, the British Government turned its attention towards their religious life and sought to undermine their existence as a separate community.

To quote W. W. Hunter again:

> *With a view to destroying the religious and personal laws of the Muslims, an act was passed by the Legislative Council by which the Muslims were deprived of the management of their religious affairs by officially appointed functionaries… The Muslims complain that we have taken away from them the means for the discharge of their religious duties and have thus brought about circumstances which have endangered their Faith.*

The British Government stopped the appointment of *Qadhis*[5] in order to reduce the importance of religion. It was suggested by the government that the continuance of the *Qadhis* in the judicial system would be tantamount to a tacit acceptance by the British Government of their (*Qadhis*) religious importance.

All these legislative changes had already been brought about during the rule of the East India Company (i.e. before 1857) and Muslims had been deprived of these privileges. The revolution of 1857 put a complete end to whatever little power and dignity that had remained with the Muslims. Everything was now doomed for the followers of Islam in India – honour, material welfare and political power. Religious freedom was also not spared. Educational institutions and centres of religious learning were closed one by one. Delhi that had for centuries been the cradle of culture and learning had been plundered.

A contemporary journal records:

> *A general massacre has been ordered in Delhi; innocent citizens are being killed every day. Thousands of men and women, and the old, young and innocent children have been burnt alive in their houses. The English commander is furious; he has ordered Major Reynard to raise to the ground the entire township of Fatehpur because the people there had objected to the construction of a church and the Christians of that place had made a complaint about this to the Commander.*

[5] Judge who rules according to the *Shari'ah*

It was a time of crisis for the religious leaders of Muslims: they could see that all political power had vanished, and with that had gone all dignity and material welfare. A large number of the *'ulama* had been killed. Only their Faith remained – though that, too, was in danger since a large number of Christian missionaries stalked the land. The Islamic Faith and the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) were constantly and maliciously attacked by them. They were, at the same time, propagating (Pauline) Christian beliefs and extolling their virtues.

On the authority of the newspaper, Nur al-Anwar (23 August 1890), the *Paigham-e-Muhammad* mentions that besides the countless native missionaries, there were at least 900 European missionaries, too, who were wholeheartedly engaged in propagating Christianity. They were at the same time supported by a whole army of ancillary workers to share their burden. It had been proclaimed in the British Parliament at the beginning of 1857 that God had helped the British so that they might win victories for Jesus Christ in the Indian subcontinent. People had also been exhorted to work untiringly for the conversion of the whole of India to Christianity. Thus efforts were being made to convert Indians to Christianity in the name of modern education. Advantage was also being taken of the poverty and economic backwardness of the Indian people and thus they were in a way being coerced into accepting Christianity. It was part of the British policy in the earlier stages, the policy that aimed at establishing British domination of India through religious conversion.

These violent changes wore a traumatic experience for the great men of learning and scholarship in those days. The preservation of Islamic teachings, the propagation of the Book of Allah and the Hadiths, and the continued adherence of the ordinary Muslim to Islam were the main problems that stared them in the face. In these days of confusion and crisis Allah Almighty gave courage and determination to some of His faithful servants who, forgetting completely their own personal interest, prepared themselves for the defence and preservation of the Islamic Faith, and for propagating the fundamental tenets of Islam.

Founding of Dar al-'Ulum, Deoband

It was at a small place near the capital called Thana Bhawan in District Muzaffarnagar[6] that some of the greatest leaders of religious opinion assembled to take stock of the situation. These men, writes Mawlana Ashiq Ilahi in his biography of *Imam Rabbani* Mawlana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi, *Tadhkirat al-Rashid*, came to Haji Imdadullah [Muhajir Makki] and pointed out to him that the Muslims at that time were virtually without a ruler and this was their main problem. Since Haji Imdadullah was their religious leader, it was proper, they suggested, that he should also assume responsibility for their worldly guidance by agreeing to become "*Amir al-Muminin*"[7]. Haji Imdadullah was thus persuaded to accede to their request and did for some time act as *Qadhi* (in accordance with the laws of the *Shari'ah*) and decided civil and criminal cases.

Mawlana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Mawlana Muhammad Qasim Nanautwi and their dependents settled down here at Thana Bhawan since their services were required by Haji Imdadullah in the discharge of his magisterial and religious-judicial duties. *Shaykh al-Islam* Mawlana Husayn Ahmed Madani points out that Mawlana Muhammad Qasim was appointed as the "Commander" while Mawlana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi was given charge of the magisterial-judicial duties. [8]

These great men openly participated in the 1857 War of Independence [9] and fought against the British Army in the battlefield of Shamli. It was in this battle that Hafiz Muhammad Zamin was killed and attained martyrdom.

When, however, the news about the loss of Delhi and the arrest of Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was received, these brave men were forced to give up fighting. As soon as the upheaval of 1857 came to an end, they began to concentrate their attention on the protection and preservation of the Islamic faith. They began to think about the problem of saving the community and the nation from the onslaught of atheism, "Nature" worship and Christianity that had come in the wake of the British rule. They did so in order to prevent the so-called "Modern" culture and civilisation from distorting their religious beliefs and conduct, actions and ways of thought.

Qasim al-'Ulum Mawlana Muhammad Qasim Nanautwi and his colleagues and friends together began to examine the various aspects of the contemporary situation. The greatest spiritual guide of the times, Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki, was also consulted in these matters. It was unanimously decided that a chain of religious educational institutions should at once be started, and also that the entire financial burden of running them should be borne by the Muslims themselves. It was also decided that the first institution of this kind should be started in the township of Deo-

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[6] A district of Uttar Pradesh state in northern India.
[7] Commander of the Faithfull
[8] *Naqsh-e-Hayat*, p. 43
[9] Dubbed by the British as the "Indian Mutiny"

band rather than in any big city. It was in accordance with these decisions that the foundation of the *madrassah* at Deoband was laid on 15th Muharram 1283 AH (21st May 1866).

At the time it was simply called the *Islamic Arabic Madrassah* and soon came to be known throughout the world as *Umm al-Madaris*[10]. The founding of the *madrassah* at Deoband led to the establishment of another at Saharanpur[11]. Very soon a whole chain of *madrassahs* came to be founded, which included Manba al-'Ulum at Gulauthi, Madrassah Shahi at Muradabad, Madrassah at Thana Bhawan, Jamia Miftah al-'Ulum at Mau, Dar al-'Ulum at Mau, and Madrassah Imdadia at Darbhanga. All these educational institutions were in some way or other directly related to the Islamic Arabic Madrassah at Deoband, and all of them had been established in the lifetime of Mawlana Qasim Nanautwi.

[10] The Mother of *Madrassahs*
[11] In November 1866, Mazahir al-'Ulum was established in Saharanpur

Why the "modern" sciences were excluded at Deoband

In view of the difficult and trying circumstances threatening the very existence of the Islamic faith at that time, it was quite natural that the courses of study at the Dar al-'Ulum and the other *madrassahs* should be kept strictly within the confines of religious and theological study.

The Book of Allah, the hadiths, jurisprudence and Islamic scholasticism were to be the cornerstone of the syllabi, and the other branches of learning such as grammar, literature, logic, philosophy and mathematics were included only insofar as they helped in the study of the core subjects. On the whole, the courses of study were aimed at imparting to the students depth of vision and farsightedness so that they may shape into the role of religious leadership and guidance of the common people and the elite, something in the tradition of the Prophets of yore. The reason why the "modem" forms of learning were excluded could best be explained in the words of the Mawlana Nanautwi himself:

> *Why, in the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge, was this policy adopted? Why were the modern sciences excluded? Among others, due consideration (whether in general education or specialised training) must be given to the aspect that needs greatest attention owing to its neglect in the past. Now anyone with the least knowledge of history knows that in the modern age, owing to the increase in the number of government institutions, the teaching of the new sciences has received the kind of attention that was denied to the traditional sciences even in the days of the best rulers of the past. There has, however, been an equally remarkable decline in the teaching of the traditional sciences of religion. Under such circumstances, to most people the establishment of one more institution of modern learning would appear to be futile and redundant. Only those branches of modern knowledge have been made a part of the syllabi at Dar al-'Ulum which lead to more effective learning of religious sciences.*[12]

Another important consideration was the fact that leaning many languages and sciences would have a distracting effect on the students. It was pointed out by Nanautwi (in the speech quoted above) that the effort to acquire the knowledge of many branches of learning usually has a detrimental effect on the learning of the core subjects. It was envisaged that the student at the Dar al-'Ulum would devote himself to the modern sciences after he has perfected himself in the traditional ones. Mawlana Nanautwi clearly stated that the students of the Dar al-'Ulum should do well to go on to a university or college to receive instruction in modern sciences after receiving religious education at the Dar al-'Ulum.

[12] Speech by Nanautwi in Ruedad-e-Madrassah Islami-Arabi, 1873 AD

The widespread popularity of the Dar al-'Ulum

Allah Almighty has given extraordinary popularity to the great Seminary at Deoband; it is this popularity that has enabled it to serve the nation as well as the community in a remarkable way. One of the main reasons for this has been the fact that the Dar al-'Ulum has never been merely an educational institution; it has also been a great centre for preparing the youth for the practical affairs of life. The institution gives to its alumni purity of conduct and excellence of morals along with access to the great treasure house of knowledge. The whole world knows that the students of the Dar al-'Ulum possess, on the one hand, scholarly dignity and self-respect, and on the other, humility, generosity, simplicity and purity. Being devout believers in the faith, they are careful in the observance of the external forms of religion, and yet at the same time, they have unbounded and heartfelt love for Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him). They never allow even the least interference in matters of faith; rather they boldly affirm what they think to be the truth in the light of the Book of Allah and the Sunnah.

The distinguished place that the Dar al-'Ulum has always possessed among educational institutions in the sub-continent is a fact that is known and accepted by just and fair-minded persons everywhere. It was the first institution that depended entirely on contributions from the ordinary members of the public. The details about the exact way in which all this is done have been given in another account of the working of the Dar al-'Ulum. This institution has also the distinction of having been founded in response to a real historical need though the majority of people at that time were not aware of that need. May Allah Almighty shower blessings to the founders of this institution who clearly visualised how the floodgates of anarchy and disruption would soon open to destroy everything and who erected this huge wall as a measure of protection and defence.

So far as the dependence of the Dar al-'Ulum on public contributions is concerned, it may be worthwhile to quote from the eightfold principles of the functioning of the *madrassah* as laid down by Mawlana Nanautwi himself:

> *The madrassah will continue to flourish with help from Allah only as long as there are no permanent and fixed means of income. In case a permanent source of income (such as an estate, a commercial establishment or the firm commitment of help by a rich man) is acquired, it will mean the end of Divine help and protection. It will lead to dissensions among the organisers; the absence of dependable financial help is, therefore, highly desirable and not a privation. Help from the government and the nobility is equally undesirable. Contributions from those who have little desire for personal glory should always be welcome. Disinterested munificence on the part of the contributors would be a source of strength and sustenance for the Dar al-'Ulum.*

The universal recognition of the role of the Dar al-'Ulum

It was the sincerity and the single-minded devotion of the founders of the *madrassah* at Deoband that has been responsible for the fact that not a single part of the Indian sub-continent has remained uninfluenced by this institution. Most of the people who are devoted to the cause of Islam are now following in the footsteps of the followers of the Dar al-'Ulum. The disciples of the learned scholars at Deoband have spread far and wide within and outside the country. They are engaged in seeking to counteract the poison that had entered the minds of the Indian Muslims with the establishment of British rule in 1857 or through the communal feelings generated by interested parties after 1947.

Hakim al-Islam Mawlana Qari Muhammad Tayyab had rightly pointed out that:

> *What, under the changing circumstances, the Dar al-'Ulum did was to prevent Muslims from accepting undesirable changes in matters of faith, and social and cultural life. It encouraged them to continue to follow their traditional ethical code that was based on simplicity and purity. This, however, did not preclude necessary adjustments in social life, particularly of the common people, that had become inevitable due to the changed circumstances. Thus it was possible to retain the original elements of the Islamic cultural design and to prevent modern and foreign elements from completely overwhelming it. Thus again it was that respect for things Islamic that was given a new lease of life by removing the insidious and corrosive sense of inferiority in the cultural onslaught from the West.*

The services rendered by the Dar al-'Ulum have generally been acknowledged throughout the world, and glorious tributes have been paid to them. One such commentator writes:

> *May Allah bless the founders of the Dar al-'Ulum at Deoband that because of their efforts the sounds of 'and thus did Allah say…' and 'thus did the Prophet say…' have thus been resounding at least in the ears of the common people, and so a firm structure of religious thinking remained undemolished in the beliefs and practices of the common people.*

He further writes:

> *The greatest defence of tradition, against attacks from modern religious rationalism, was made by the people at Deoband who thought to protect religion by encircling it within the bounds of Divine and Prophetic sayings… Deoband is not merely an educational institution but a powerful movement, which has played an effective role and which has been a source of much inspiration both in theoretical and practical matters. It is not difficult to see that the source of the varied activities – scholarly, spiritual, religious, political and evangelical of Shaykh al-Hadith Mawlana Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Hakim al-Ummat Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanwi, Mujahid-e-Hurriyat Mawlana Husayn Ahmad Madani, Shaykh al-Islam Mawlana Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani, Muballigh-e-Millat Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas, and of Shaykh al-Hind Mawlana Mahmudul Hasan is none other than the Deoband movement. Most of the religious educational institutions, and religious and theological movements have their links with Deoband almost in the way that the mosques all over the world have with the Kaaba at Makkah. There is thus no doubt about the fact*

that almost all the dynamic elements in the religious life of the subcontinent – except, of course, those whose religious endeavour is confined solely to the celebration of the saints' anniversaries, prayers for intercession and the Prophet's (peace be upon him) birthday meetings – are related to the different branches of the Deoband movement. [13]

Another writer points out:

No sane person can deny the fact that it was the great alumni of the Dar al-'Ulum at Deoband who went to the nooks and corners of the country and defended the pure faith against attacks from heresy, modification and allegorisation. The institution has made valuable contribution to the cause of the preservation of the Islamic way of life in India and elsewhere. Whatever true spirituality, respect for the men and sciences of religion, and correct Islamic beliefs among men are still found in the country is, no doubt, largely owing to the Dar al-'Ulum.[14]

The truth is generally recognised that if the Deoband movement had not come after the events of 1857 and if the Indian Muslims had not come under the profound influence of the great and learned men of Deoband, the true face of Islam would have either been distorted or the faith would have entirely been wiped out from the land.

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal had rightly pointed out to Hakim Ahmad Shuja:

Let the madrassahs remain as they are. Let the children of the poor Muslims continue to study in those madrassahs. Do you know what will happen if these mullahs and dervishes disappeared? I have elsewhere seen the result with my own eyes. The end of the influence of these madrassahs would be very much like what had happened in Spain: there are no traces of the eight centuries of Muslim rule in Spain except the ruins of Granada and Cordoba and the palaces of Al-Hamra and Bab al-Akhwain, and without these madrassahs there would be no trace left of Islam except the Taj Mahal at Agra and the Red Fort in Delhi.[15]

It is a fact that religious madrassahs have played a crucial role in the teaching of the Book of Allah and the Sunnah and the preservation of the Islamic faith in the subcontinent. It is because of them that the mosques are frequented, the sound of "Allah-u-Akbar" can still be heard from their minarets and knowledge has reached homes where the inmates cannot receive a square meal twice a day. The alumni of the Dar al-'Ulum can be seen giving instruction in the excellence of morals and conduct from the mimbars of mosques throughout the length and breadth of the country and abroad. We can have some idea of the extent of the services rendered by the Dar al-'Ulum from the fact that the number of its alumni who completed the entire syllabus exceeds 17,000 — including 4,000 students that came from foreign countries like Afghanistan, Russia, China, Australia, South America, England, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, Ceylon, South Africa, Zambia, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The number of students that could not complete the full Arabic syllabus but who studied Qur'an reading and recitation, Urdu, Persian and elementary Arabic is more than 70,000. Thus the total number of the Dar al-'Ulum's alumni comes close to

[13] *Mithaq, Lahore*
[14] *Payam-e-Nadwadat-al-Ulema*
[15] *Tamir-i-Hayat*

100,000). Besides Deoband there are thousands of other religious Madrasahs in cities, towns and villages, which are also in some way or other related to the Dar al-'Ulum.[16]

May Allah bless *Hujjat al-Islam* Nanautwi and his colleagues and disciples for having strongly and successfully defended Islam against all its antagonists. They went out to sing praises of Islam and its Prophet (peace be upon him) throughout the length and breadth of the country. They silenced Christian missionaries and other detractors by giving well-argued and crushing replies to their objections against Islam. These great men also wrote treatises with a view to arming the ordinary Muslim for the defence of his faith, so much so that the Christian missionary had to retreat from the field taking refuge in his home and church. Of course, there were other learned men besides those of Deoband, who rendered unforgettable services. Mention may be made of the founder of the Nadwat al-Ulama[17], Mawlana Sayyid Muhammad Ali Mungeri (d. 1928 AD), who wrote a number of widely acclaimed books.

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[16] These figures were accurate at the time when the book was initially written in the early 1980s – The Editor

[17] Dar al-'Ulum Nadwat al-'Ulama was established in 1898 in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh state,

British counter-efforts

The British tried hard to persuade Indians to study in schools established by the government by opening institutions of Oriental learning so that they might imbibe Western modes of thought and sensibility while remaining Indian only in appearance. The famous nineteenth century Orientalist, Garcon de Tassi, writes:

> *It cannot be denied that those Indian young men who are studying in government institutions or mission schools would naturally be inclined towards Christianity.*[18]

The foreign rulers of the country were certainly the main beneficiaries of this educational system. de Tassi again writes:

> *With the spread of the European system of education there has been a corresponding increase in the propagation of the European cultural norms and of Christianity which is gaining ground in India and the number of its followers increasing day by day*[19]*.*

The British rulers instigated many political and religious movements that had specifically aimed at misleading Indian Muslims. The *'ulama* of the Dar al-'Ulum faced them with courage and determination and it was because of their efforts that Muslims were able to protect themselves from the disruptive activities of the British. The Arya Samaj movement[20] that had already come into existence during the lifetime of Nanautwi began a vicious propaganda campaign against the basic tenets of the Islamic faith. It was the founder of the Dar al-'Ulum himself who faced the challenges posed by the movement, he was followed by his disciples.

As a result of these endeavours the Muslim community remained totally unaffected by this anti-Islamic movement to the utter discomfiture of its initiators.

Then came the movement called the "Shuddhi Sangathan" which aimed at the "reconversion" of Muslims. This time, too, the *'ulama* of Deoband faced the challenge, and the movement was a total failure with loss of face for the British who had encouraged it.

While the learned *'ulama* of this great institution dedicated themselves to the cause of the propagation of the faith through teaching and oratory, they also engaged themselves wholeheartedly in the pursuit of *tasawwuf*. In this sphere also they were the guides of millions of Muslims in the country. Through spiritual illumination, vows of allegiance (*bay'at*), purification of the inner life of the heart and spiritual catharsis they helped thousands of their faithful followers to arrive at the truth and illumined their hearts with the light of Divine contemplation (*marifah*).

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[18] *Addresses*, Urdu translation, p. 408
[19] Ibid, p. 407
[20] A Hindu reform movement founded in 1875 by Swami Dayananda

The founders and the learned alumni of the Dar al-'Ulum were constantly engaged in writing books and treatises on religious and spiritual subjects. The number of their writings that have been published comes to thousands. They wrote books and treatises dealing with all the branches of divinity: commentaries on the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, Islamic scholasticism, tasawwuf and history. *Hakim al-Ummat* Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanvi alone wrote more than a thousand books.

Among others who made contributions to the world of learning by writing books may be mentioned the names of Nanautwi, Gangohi, *Shaykh al-Hind*, *Hakim-al-Ummat* Thanwi, 'Allamah Kashmiri, 'Allamah 'Uthmani, Mawlana Aizaz 'Ali, Mawlana Muhammad Idris Kandhelwi, Mawlana Badre Alam, Mawlana Thanaullah Amritsari, Mawlana Madani, Mawlana Ubaidullah Sindhi, Mawlana Mansoor Ansari, Mawlana Sayyid Muhammad Mia, Mufti Kifayatullah, Mufti Muhammad Shafi', Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf and many others.

Among the living *'ulama* at Deoband mention may be made of *Hakim al-Islam* Qari Muhammad Tayyab (*Muhtamim*, Dar al-'Ulum), *al-Ustad* Habib al-Rahman Azami, Mawlana Sa'id Ahmad Akbarabadi, Mawlana Muhammad Manzur Nu'mani, Mawlana Abu al-Hasan 'Ali Nadwi and Mawlana Minnatullah Rahmani.[21]

Thousands of readers throughout the country have benefitted from their innumerable writings. May Allah give them long life to enable them to continue their invaluable service to the community. The brief comments that have been made above must have made it amply clear that without the courage and determination of the founders of the Dar al-'Ulum and its innumerable alumni the shape of things in the subcontinent would have been entirely different. The living embodiments of knowledge and scholarship, moral excellence and purity, and of devoutness that can be seen everywhere now would have probably been non-existent without the efforts made by those associated with the Dar al-'Ulum.

Deoband has played a crucial role in the struggle for Indian independence. It can even be said that freedom came to India largely because of the efforts made by the scholars of Deoband; they did not rest till India had achieved freedom from the British rule. Unfortunately, some prejudiced persons hesitate now in free India to acknowledge the services rendered by Deoband in this regard, but who can forget the fact that it was for the country's freedom that *Shaykh al-Hind* Mawlana Mahmud al-Hasan, *Shaykh al-Islam* Mawlana Madani, Mawlana Aziz Gul and Hakim Nusrat Husayn had to suffer deportation to Malta where they had to endure many hardships.

Again it was for the same cause that Mawlana Ubaidullah Sindhi and Mawlana Mansur Ansari were sent in exile from which the latter never returned. Mufti Kifayatullah, Mawlana Ahmad Sayeed, Mawlana Habib al-Rahman Ludhianwi, Mawlana Hifz al-Rahman Seoharwi and hundreds of other *'ulama* suffered baton blows and

[21] All of these personalities have since passed away.

spent years in jail. Mawlana Minnatullah, an important member of the advisory council of the Dar al-'Ulum and the General Secretary of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, is a living testimony to the suffering endured by the *'ulama* in jail in the cause of India's freedom.

The *'ulama* of the Dar al-'Ulum have not remained inactive in free India. If they have made their contribution to the reconstruction of the country, they have also looked after the interests of the Muslim community as part of the national life. It was the Dar al-'Ulum that came forward to preserve the separate identity of the Muslims by insisting on a separate Muslim personal law. The statement issued by Qari Tayyab, the rector of Dar al-'Ulum Deoband, received countrywide attention leading to the Bombay convention on the issue. Almost all Muslim organisations in the country and Muslim intellectuals participated in that convention. A Muslim Personal Law Board was formed which is active throughout the country. As has already been pointed out the main aim of the Dar al-'Ulum is and has always been the propagation of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the endeavour to keep the Faith in its original form and to preserve the tenets of Islam along with safeguarding the community from religious heresies and warning it about pitfalls in political life, and it can be confidently asserted that this great institution has eminently succeeded in this endeavour.

The Dar Ulum is relevant now more than ever in this fast-changing world where everything is in flux. It is still relevant because it reaffirms the lasting and the abiding behind this apparent spectacle of change and inconstancy.